

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

About three fourths of all the people who unite with the Brethren Church do so during the months from October 1 to April 1. Why this is so, we are unable to say. Is the winter season more favorable to the conversion of souls than the summer season? Or do our pastors and churches relax their energy during the hot summer months? Surely the winter season is not any more God's special "day" for the salvation of souls than the summer season, for with God it is *now*, *to-day*, whether summer or winter. It is our opinion that with the same effort and zeal on the part of pastor and people, the summer season would be as fruitful in the conversion of souls as the winter season. The responsibility is with the church and not with God. We do not know that God has any *special* seasons for revival; *now* is the time; *to-day* is the day of salvation. What is needed, is, not less zeal during the winter season, but *more* during the summer. To have a "revival meeting" once a year at which twenty-five or fifty souls are gathered into the fold is a good thing, but to have *one* conversion each Sabbath, or an average of one during the year, is better. The latter will hold more of the fifty converts and make a better working church.

Some ten or twelve years ago we clipped an editorial from the *Independent* of New York, under the caption "Who is Responsible," which we here repeat in full as it is to point:

"Are we to have a winter marked by revivals and large ingatherings of souls, or is this season to pass by without such blessed results? No doubt all will agree that we ought to have a season of revival, and that such a consummation is the desire of all truly devout men and women. The practical question arises: 'Who is responsible for bringing about this result?' We may as well begin to answer this question by putting aside all false refuges.

First among these is the one so often sought by Christians who have either imbibed false teaching, or who desire to shrink responsibility—namely, that God only can bring about a revival. The danger of this position is that it contains a great truth. Certainly man cannot of himself produce spiritual results. Without the presence and power of the Holy Ghost we "can do nothing." There are, however, two or three fallacies which habitually lurk in and about this truth. We might as well say that we can only grow in grace as "God works in us to will and to do his good pleasure." Never-

theless we are commanded to "work out our own salvation," for that very reason. God works with and for the soul that reaches up and out toward him for his help and blessing. He does not come to the soul unbidden, and unsought either by the soul itself or by some one specially interested to pray for it or seek it out. It is the same in respect to revivals. God only can produce a revival of religion in the hearts of his people and effect the regeneration of the unconverted. But he does this in connection with human ministry and effort. We have no reason to believe that any human soul is ever converted, as we understand conversion, without having the Word preached to him; for faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. The preacher might as well stop preaching because God only can convert men, as the Church stand still and wait for God to bring about a revival. It is true that a revival often occurs when there has apparently been no special preparation for it or effort made to bring it down from Heaven by the Church; but if we were able to trace the history of these sudden awakenings we would be sure to find out that some person or persons had been earnestly waiting upon God and working with men."

Sometimes, even in this our day, we hear Christians talking about God's "set time to favor Zion," as though God had times when he was willing and ready to bless his people and convert sinners, and times when he withheld his power, merely as an act of sovereignty. This is without doubt a great libel on the gracious disposition of God. His time is "now," and "now" is his "day of salvation." "Say not in your hearts, there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest! Behold I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." There is never a moment of time when God is not waiting to be gracious to sinners, or when a sinner crying to God for salvation, will not be heard and answered; and even so, there is never a month or day when God is not ready and waiting to hear the cry of his people and bless them with a revival of religion. He is as favorable to his people now as when of old they were in captivity. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me and go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." "Call upon me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou know-

est not." We might add a multitude of such promises, all going to show how ready God is to make bare his arm and open the windows of Heaven and pour us out a blessing that we shall not have room enough to receive it.

The responsibility, for a revival, then, lies with God's people and not with him. If we fail of seeing a season of great blessing, beginning at once and continuing during the entire season, it will be because we have not called upon the Lord, or sought him with our whole hearts, or brought in all the tithes. No doubt a large measure of this responsibility lies with the pastors, who must rightly divide the truth, by preaching such truth as is calculated to find the hearts and consciences of both saints and sinners. There is a deal of faithful preaching needed both for the Church and for the world. In many cases the Church is asleep, lukewarm, worldly, and self-seeking; has partially if not largely forgotten her mission as a great missionary and evangelizing organization, and is at ease with herself concerning the masses of unconverted people all around her. No doubt there are many sins tolerated in the Church which ought to be rebuked, and many professors who, like Achan of old, are hindering the onward march of Christ's triumph by having stolen some wedges of gold and goodly Babylonish garments, and appropriated them to their own uses. Until these sins are rebuked and these sinners in Zion brought to judgment, there will be no revivals in our churches, though God may and will preserve a witness to himself in the occasional conversion of a soul through the faithfulness of some individual believer. Moreover, the ministers must see to it that even faithful and wisely divided preaching is done not "in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Formal and perfunctory preaching will not bring about a revival of religion. The Word of God must be in living energy before it will pierce "to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." There is very much responsibility resting with the minister. Let every one, therefore, in charge of the ministry see to it that he is clear of the blood of souls by giving faithful testimony to his hearers."

You will find some Christians who know not whence their next bread is to come, speaking of the bounty of their God, while other some are repining in the midst of plenty.—*Flavel*.